

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 004576

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV EG

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER ALLEGES PLOT TO FIX THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Classified by ECPO Counselor John Desrocher for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In a June 16 meeting, Ayman Nour, the embattled leader of the opposition Ghad Party and presidential candidate, alleged to poloff that aides to President Mubarak have "persuaded" Khalid Mohieldin, the 84 year old honorary chairman of the leftist Tagammu' Party, to run for president.

Mohieldin has been sending mixed signals about his intentions ever since he first expressed interest in running back in March. Nour alleged that Mohieldin had agreed to run in exchange for a payment of LE 5 million (about USD 862,000) and a guarantee of about 20 percent of the vote. Under the deal, Nour asserted, President Mubarak will "take about 70 percent of the vote" and Mohieldin will take "about 20 percent."

¶2. (C) The remaining ten percent of the vote, Nour claimed, would be divided among what he predicted would be "about ten other candidates," including himself and leaders of small opposition parties who will take advantage of the grandfather clause in the constitutional amendment ratified in May which allows any registered political party to field a candidate in the 2005 elections only. (In future presidential elections, according to the terms of the amendment, political parties will only be allowed to field candidates if they hold at least five percent of the seats in the legislature.) Nour said he had learned of the "transaction" from friends who are disillusioned members of the Tagammu' Party, who reportedly "confirmed" the story with Kamal al-Shazli, the veteran machine politician and deputy Secretary-General of the ruling National Democratic Party.

¶3. (C) Comment: While Nour's story has the hallmarks of typical grist from the unceasing Cairo rumor mill, it is still plausible. The GOE has a long and well documented history of extensive electoral manipulation and fraud, witnessed most recently during the May 25 referendum on the amendment to Article 76 of the constitution. Shazli in particular is widely believed in previous elections to have promised given parties or interest groups a set number of seats, in exchange for various concessions, and is also widely thought to have "sold" seats to aspiring MPs to the highest bidder.

¶4. (C) That the GOE would be eager to enlist Mohieldin as an opponent to Mubarak makes perfect sense. Though his leftist politics are out of step with the much of the public, he is still a widely respected "national figure," a status he enjoys as one of the original "Free Officers" who conspired to overthrow King Farouk in 1952. At 84, he makes Mubarak look young and sprightly by comparison. He would seem to fit the bill as someone the GOE could describe as a credible, worthy opponent but who in fact poses no electoral threat whatsoever. End comment.

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GRAY